

Title: The Importance of Public Awareness and Involvement in Human Spaceflight

First of all, I'd like to state that it's a pleasure to know that NASA will hopefully be broadening human exploration of space in my lifetime. I'm currently 27, and thus missed out on witnessing firsthand the Apollo program, which was such a formative experience for my parents' and grandparents' generations. I'm hoping that I will be able to sit in front of the computer with my kids and see where we'll go next in the final frontier.

Second, before I get to my primary point, I'd like to voice my support for the "Lunar Base" initial scenario of exploration, culminating in future manned Mars missions that would perhaps emanate from the already established Lunar base (if it's more cost effective than going straight from Earth). The next logical step from the ISS is to establish a long-term presence on the Moon. From there, it's reasonable to jump out to Mars. It might feel like "old news" to simply revisit the Moon for a week, but it seems premature to jump directly to Mars. A Lunar base is a good compromise between the desire to be on the cutting edge and the wisdom of not jumping straight into the deep end before learning how to swim. I heard that a single Mars mission would take around 2.5 years for a single crew but that our current space experience is only up to about 6 months per astronaut (the maximum time that a single astronaut spends on the ISS per visit). The physiological and psychological stresses of a Mars mission will not just be multiplied by a factor of five, rather they will be of a qualitatively higher order. More preparation may be needed on the human side of exploration even if we're technologically ready to go to Mars. Obviously this is just the opinion of a layman; the experts may totally disagree. Either way, in my mind we should be seeking to establish a permanent presence in space, which won't be accomplished by excursions to Mars (unless we're planning on setting up a permanent Mars base).

In any event, the primary point I wanted to address is the matter of the public's awareness and involvement in human exploration. I remember a few years ago that there was a prime time TV special on whether NASA "Faked" the Apollo missions. People, including myself, actually watched it!!! It seems to me that the reason why some people are willing to believe that we didn't go to the Moon is that human space travel is so out of our experience. It's just not "real" to us; in fact, it's almost less real than what Hollywood produces! Public support for the Space Program would be heavily boosted if people related to it as being "cooler than Star Trek." And public support for the Program means more kids succeeding in Math and Science, etc. I'd like to propose an idea for making our next visit to the Moon real for everyone on Earth:

Include a big-name professional journalist on the first manned mission - Just as this made the 2003 war in Iraq more real for Americans, it will make the Moon more real for the world. Obviously they'll have to be trained for the mission so that they won't just be luggage. This "embedded journalist" will both be a reporter on the mission and an active participant in it. If you do it right, people will really identify with the first trip back to the Moon, and they should further identify with the others as well. Additionally, please consider including a restarted Teacher in Space program in your plans.

Please feel free to quote this publicly if you see any benefit to doing so. However, please don't mention my name nor email address.

Thank you very much for your efforts!